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STENEHJEM WARNS OF COUNTERFEIT MONEY ORDERS

BISMARCK – Attorney General Wayne Stenehjem is cautioning consumers and financial institutions to be alert to counterfeit Money Orders.

The Minot Police Department notified Stenehjem that several counterfeit United States Postal Service money orders were accepted at Minot area financial institutions. Some unsuspecting consumers attempted to negotiate the money orders, while others have notified the police of the suspicious money orders.

“We have seen this scam not only in Minot but elsewhere in the state, too. In other cities, counterfeit money orders from different companies have been uncovered,” said Stenehjem. “Consumers should be very cautious when they receive a money order from someone they don’t know well, or under suspicious circumstances.”

According to Parrell Grossman, Director of the Attorney General’s Consumer Protection Division, many of the fraudulent money orders originate from Nigerian con artists asking e-mail recipients to do a “favor” by cashing them in return for a percentage of the money, and in other instances the consumer had advertised an item for sale online and received the money order as payment.

United States Postal Service money orders have several security features designed to allow detection of counterfeits and protect consumers. Authentic USPS money orders, when held to the light, display a watermark of Benjamin Franklin repeated from top to bottom on the left of the money order. Also, a dark line, or security thread, runs from top to bottom with the word “USPS” repeated.

“If these security features are not visible in a US Postal Service money order, then it is a counterfeit. Money orders from other companies have different security features to protect consumers but the best protection is caution,” said Stenehjem. “If a total stranger pays more than the asking price, or offers a share of the cash in return for a favor, then it’s always a scam.”

Consumers and financial institutions who suspect or detect counterfeit money orders from the United State Postal Service or any other company should contact local law enforcement or the Attorney General’s Consumer Protection Division toll-free at 1-800-472-2600.